

Outline of the Report on the Follow-up to the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Method used

The outline was drafted in consultation with all ministries concerned with policy on the elderly and ageing.

Brief summary of the report on the 10 RIS commitments

Commitment 1

The Netherlands is meeting this commitment:

- the government has a coherent vision of policy on the elderly from the perspective of an ageing population;
- an ageing monitor exists for a broad range of government policy.

Commitment 2

The Netherlands is also meeting this commitment:

- action is being taken to promote labour market participation by people aged 55-65;
- encouraging people with a disability or other problem to participate in society and function independently is one of the areas covered by the Social Support Act;
- older people receive a discount on public transport fares;
- cultural participation: older people receive a discount on entrance fees for cultural events and museums.

Commitment 3

The Netherlands has met this commitment.

Commitment 4

The Netherlands is fulfilling this commitment in the form of:

- a recent modernisation of the social security system (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, SZW);
- modernisation of the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act and a new healthcare insurance system.

Commitment 5

The Netherlands is taking steps to meet this commitment:

- labour market measures
- changes to social security
- fiscal measures
- part-time pensions
- expanding the employability of workers with the help of the social partners, through
 - the recent modernisation of the unemployment insurance system

- the abolition of tax breaks for early retirement
- a campaign to encourage older employers to continue working
- a programme to encourage the elderly to continue participating in society
- working time accounts

Commitment 6

The Dutch government and social partners have made progress in:

- promoting age-aware personnel policies;
- intersectoral mobility;
- lifelong learning.

Commitment 7

The government is taking steps in this area:

- Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment national policy framework on housing for older people;
- separation of housing and care and promotion of housing, care and social welfare combinations;
- a tight network of family doctors acting as gatekeepers;
- Social Support Act and local authorities' obligation to provide disabled and elderly people with the assistance they need;
- the 'more exercise for the elderly' target for 2007 has been met.

Commitment 8

The Netherlands is working on this commitment by means of the following:

- the independent Review Committee for equal rights policy has drafted a paper and held an expert meeting on the gender aspects of ageing;
- Equal Treatment Act;
- Equal Opportunities Monitor;
- equal pay policy.

Commitment 9

The Netherlands has made major efforts in this area:

- new health insurance system;
- recent expansion of the basic package of health insurance (which entails older people paying towards dental check-ups and the contraceptive pill, for example);
- Exceptional Medical Expenses Act for people who needs long-term care, like elderly and disabled;
- respite care also covered by the General Medical Expenses Act;
- extra money for informal care;
- collective labour agreements including work-life balance schemes declared universally binding.

Commitment 10

The Netherlands is working towards fulfilling this commitment:

- broad consultations were held with the field in preparing for the government's policy document on the elderly;
- the House of Representatives has established a special Committee on Ageing Policy. Having consulted experts and civil society organisations this parliamentary committee published a report (*Lang zullen we leven!*) in December 2005. One of its recommendations was 'active participation in European consultations on ageing policy'.

Conclusion

Since 2002, ageing policy has been developed and put into practice for all RIS commitments listed in the Berlin Plan of Action, and results have been achieved.

0. General Information

Country name

The Netherlands

Name of and information about the author(s) of the report

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Name of official focal point on ageing and contact details

Annet den Hoed (see above)

Name, reference, and date of adoption or status of preparation of national strategy, action plan or similar policy document on ageing (please attach relevant documents in the annex).

Government's letter on policy on the elderly in response to population ageing (*Kabinetsbrief Ouderenbeleid in het perspectief van de vergrijzing*; 64 for short) 19 April 2005.

1. Situation, Activities and Priorities Related to Ageing

a) National ageing situation

A summary of the facts related to ageing policy, produced for the Dutch Presidency of the European Union, is enclosed with this report (English factsheet, annex 1).

b) Instrumental assessment

Since the adoption of the MIPAA in 2002, policy and legislation in the Netherlands have been reformed in several key areas, most notably social security, social support and health care.

There have also been changes in housing and transport for older people. A special transport scheme (Valys) has been introduced, for example, targeting a number of groups, including older people. Housing policy now includes a greater focus on building and adapting housing for older people.

The health care budget increased further in the 2002-2006 period.

c) Identification of areas for in-depth evaluation

A new government was being formed as this report was being prepared. At the time of reporting, the new government's priorities in this area were not known.

2. Methodology of In-Depth Evaluation of Identified Priorities

Since this report was drawn up during the formation of a new government, and no information was available on priorities and possible policy changes at the time of writing, a short consultation process was chosen.

3. National Capacities for Follow-up to MIPAA/RIS

a) institutional follow-up: what institutions are responsible for follow-up to MIPAA/RIS?

The priority directions of the Madrid Plan of Action are addressed in the regular activities of many parties, including ministries, local authorities, social partners, and national health care, housing and social welfare umbrella organisations.

b) organizations of older persons: do national organizations of older people take part in the follow-up activities?

The priority directions of the Madrid Plan of Action are covered by the regular activities of various organisations for older people such as the National Fund for Organisations for Patients, the Disabled and the Elderly (Nationaal Fonds voor Patiënten, Gehandicapten en Ouderenorganisaties, PGO), the associations for the elderly (ouderenbonden) and patient associations.

c) educational, training and research activities on ageing: what activities on education, training and research are undertaken in your country with regard to ageing?

Various centres of expertise and umbrella organisations for older people are engaged in developing and/or disseminating knowledge. Professionals and volunteers also receive training from organisations including MOvisie, FORUM, Vilans, Equality, LEEFtijd, ANBO, PCOB, UnieKBO.

d) data collection and analysis: does the available data and research allow getting an adequate picture on ageing related situation in your country?

Data are gathered by a number of institutions, foremost among them being the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), the Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP), the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB), Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM).

e) mobilization of financial resources: what resources have been specifically dedicated to MIPAA/RIS follow-up?

The release of manpower and resources to support the coordination of ageing policy at central government level has indirectly contributed to some of the priority directions of the Madrid Plan of Action 2002.

f) independent and impartial monitoring of progress in implementation: what are the monitoring mechanisms in place for the review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS?

Central government has a monitor to help it track progress with ageing policy. An independent body – the Social and Cultural Planning Office – is monitoring developments in seven key areas from 2005-2010.

4. Review and Appraisal by Subject Area

RIS Commitment 1: Mainstreaming ageing

1. What are the areas in which ageing is mainstreamed and to what extent is this done?

Ageing policy in the areas covered by central government policy has been set out in a single government policy letter.

To what extent do the different policies related to ageing pursue a holistic approach and are coordinated and applied consistently?

See 1.

What initiatives has your country taken to tackle age discrimination? Which results have these initiatives achieved?

Kenniscentrum LEEFtijd (a centre of expertise on ageing), Equal Treatment Commission, associations for the elderly, the National Fund for Organisations for Patients, the Disabled and the Elderly and a nationwide network of anti-discrimination centres.

The Equal Treatment in Employment (Age Discrimination) Act (Wet gelijke behandeling op grond van leeftijd bij de arbeid), introduced in 2004, imposes strict conditions.

Kenniscentrum LEEFtijd monitors legislation and case law and helps ensure the law is practicable.

What is the participation of older persons in the development of policies and strategies and in their implementation?

Local authorities are accountable to different groups in their community (including older people) and ensure they are actively involved in policy on social support. CSO (Coördinatieorgaan Samenwerkende Ouderenorganisaties), the umbrella organisation of associations for the elderly, ensures pensioners are involved in the decision-making of the boards of pension funds and in efforts to achieve good pension fund governance.

1. To what extent are NGOs and the private sector involved in policy development and what is their role in the implementation of policies and programmes?

The social partners and national centres of expertise are demand-driven, and also respond to demand from older people.

Core active ageing policies include lifelong learning, later and more gradual retirement, remaining active after retirement and engaging in capacity enhancement and health-sustaining activities. Such practices aim at raising individual quality of life as well as contributing to greater growth, lower burdens and substantial cost savings in pensions and health care at societal level. Their implementation requires the involvement of all stakeholders in a spirit of dialogue and partnership.

The government involves employers, trade associations and sector organisations in efforts to enable people to continue working for longer. It has put in place an incentive scheme to promote age-awareness by encouraging these partners to develop and disseminate new policy instruments. They are also involved in sectoral and intersectoral labour mobility projects designed to reveal opportunities and obstacles.

RIS Commitment 2: Integration and participation of older persons

What measures has your country undertaken to recognise, encourage and support the contributions of older people to society (e.g. media campaigns, school curricula)?

Social Support Act, informal care support scheme, public information campaign on Social Support Act via associations for the elderly.

g) What mechanisms has your country put in place to take into account the views of older persons on the services provided to them?

The CSO, the umbrella organisation of associations for the elderly, is involved in the debate currently being conducted under the auspices of the Labour Foundation on pensioner representation in pension fund management. The CSO is entitled to nominate pensioners' representatives to join pension fund participants' councils. The participants' council is similar to a works council, and has the right to advise the board in its decisions, either on request or on its own initiative.

The CSO is also involved in the implementation of the agreements concerning pension fund governance, and also speaks for older people in the debate on their income status.

Under the Social Support Act the local authority is accountable to residents (and the council) both for preparing plans and for the activities undertaken.

The Exceptional Medical Expenses Act provides for patient fundholding.

The Federation of Patient and Consumer Organisations in the Netherlands has been officially recognised.

h) How has your country encouraged the participation of older persons in society, culture and economy?

Work and Social Assistance Act (WWB)

Social Support Act (WMO)

The Social Support Act entered into force on 1 January 2007. The aim of the new legislation is to ensure that everyone, both young and old, is able to participate in society.

Local authorities are primarily responsible for encouraging and facilitating participation. The WMO specifically governs participation by people with disabilities, requiring local authorities to provide individual services in terms of housing, transport, domestic help and the forging of social contacts to enable disabled people to participate in society. Local authorities must realise that, if regular services are inaccessible, they will be obliged to provide (expensive) individual services for people with disabilities. The aim is to make the local infrastructure more accessible. The Social Support Act replaces the Social Welfare Act and the Services for the Disabled Act.

Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ)

The Exceptional Medical Expenses Act is a form of health insurance covering long-term care of the elderly and disabled, for example. Under this legislation, everyone requiring long-term care has the right to it when they fall victim to illness or invalidity.

The government and civil society organisations have worked hard over the past few years to focus on the needs and wishes of clients. The introduction of new rules on 1 April 2003 giving clients more choice and a greater say in their care represented an important step in this direction.

The costs of health care have risen sharply in recent years, as has the demand for care. In its efforts to keep care affordable, the government has been forced to intervene. Some of the care formerly covered by the AWBZ has therefore been transferred to the Social Support Act, while some now falls under the Healthcare Insurance Act (ZVW). The AWBZ now largely covers 'major' long-term care.

Collaboration between organisations for elderly immigrants

A declaration of intent to set up a network of organisations for elderly immigrants (NOOM) was signed on 13 March 2007. This partnership, under the auspices of CSO, the umbrella organisation of associations for the elderly, aims to improve social participation by elderly immigrants throughout the country. The National Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee (LOM), which speaks on behalf of immigrants, is also represented in the network.

In terms of public transport:

- discounted public transport fares for elderly people already existed in 2002;
- after 2002, several regions began experimenting with free public transport for elderly people, one of the key aims of which was to improve social participation;

- phased plans to make public transport more accessible for people with functional disabilities – a target group set to grow sharply as a result of ageing – were introduced for both bus and rail transport in 2005-2006;
- accessibility requirements are a feature of the regional public transport concessions, and transport companies will have almost 100% accessible bus fleets by 2010;
- the decentralised public transport authorities are to draw up implementation plans for alterations to bus stops in 2007, aimed at raising the proportion of bus stops accessible to disabled people from the current 2% nationwide to 50% by 2015, making public transport facilities fully accessible to some 70% of passengers;
- the phased introduction of accessible trains and alterations to stations were included in an implementation plan agreed in 2006 covering the period to 2030, to be put into practice as part of the annual management plans of infrastructure company ProRail and the transport plan of rail company NS;
- by 2030 70% of stations will be fully accessible, so that 90% of passengers will live within a 15 km radius of an accessible station.

i) What activities have you undertaken to promote the political participation of older persons and in particular of older women?

See b) and c).

j) What mechanisms and organisations exist in your country to provide a political voice for older persons and how have they been promoted?

Associations for the elderly (ouderenbonden) and the Federation of Patients and Consumer Organisations in the Netherlands (NPCF).

k) Have you set up a national advisory body on ageing or a similar institutional mechanism that includes older persons to ensure a dynamic and coordinated contribution of older persons to national policy responses to ageing?

The House of Representatives has established a Committee on Ageing Policy.

l) Have you adopted policies and programmes to improve the housing and living environment of older persons especially in rural areas? This includes access to and affordability of services, such as housing, utility, sanitation and in particular transportation.

In 2004 the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) launched an action plan (House of Representatives 2003-2004, 28 951) which set a target for suitable housing for the elderly. By 2015, around 400,000 extra dwellings suitable for elderly or disabled people must be available. The growth may take the form of new developments, alterations to existing dwellings or better allocation of existing suitable housing. Progress with suitable housing will be monitored.

As regards urban areas, a number of towns and cities are to receive money for urban regeneration. They will be specifically requested to increase the amount of housing suitable for older people.

The housing benefit system in the Netherlands ensures that suitable housing is affordable for elderly people.

a) What steps has your country taken to promote age-integrated communities where facilities are made available to people of all ages and where they can meet and interact (e.g. joint community centres for the elderly and the young)?

There are many local projects that combine housing with social welfare and care facilities for elderly people in the community. The Social Support Act includes provisions relating to social participation.

Local authorities are obliged to develop activities in this area.

Housing developments for a range of income and age groups (to reinforce the social structure of communities).

b) How has your country promoted volunteer activities to enable younger and older people to interact and help each other?

Under the new Social Support Act local authorities are responsible for supporting local voluntary schemes. Young people are also encouraged to participate. The government intends to introduce mandatory community service for young people while they are at school.

See commitment 4, under 'care leave'.

a) What steps has your country taken to promote a positive image of ageing (e.g. media campaigns, incentives for employers to promote continued employment of older persons, initiatives within local communities and with participation of other social actors to facilitate dialogue and a better understanding between the generations)? In this respect, it is important to promote a differentiated and heterogeneous view of the life of older persons to better reflect reality.

See commitment 2 a). Working time accounts, campaign to encourage older employees to continue working, programme to encourage the elderly to continue participating in society, ILC Zorg voor Later Network.

b) What actions (in particular in cooperation with mass media) have been taken to encourage older persons to make the general public more aware of the positive aspects of ageing?

The Government Information Service is studying the effects of different forms of communication for and involving older people. Public information campaign on working time accounts. See also commitment 4.

RIS Commitment 3: Promotion of equitable and sustainable economic growth in response to population ageing

a) What strategies has your country adopted to transform your economies with a view to eradicating poverty especially among older persons?

The best cure for poverty is work, and the Netherlands has undertaken several forms of action to increase the labour market participation rate of older people. There is plenty of room for improvement: out of a current potential working population of 4.5 individuals for every person over 65, only 3.2 actually work. Since 2003 successive governments have pursued a reform agenda in an attempt to achieve the necessary increase in labour market participation. Changes to the tax breaks enabling early retirement, as well as to invalidity and unemployment benefit, have played a key role. Uptake of these schemes is expected to drop, with older people remaining in work longer. As part of the effort to reduce poverty, there will be a renewed focus on reducing non-uptake of income support schemes. Data exchange will allow the details of any people over 65 without a full state pension to be passed on to their local authority, thus allowing the authority to inform them of their right to social assistance.

b) What measures has your country taken to review and adjust the macroeconomic policies to address the needs of a growing ageing population?

The Netherlands strives to achieve a strong economy with equal opportunities for all, built on people who continue to invest in their knowledge and skills throughout their lives. Raising the labour market participation rate is one of the main planks of efforts to cater for the implications of an ageing population. The Netherlands also emphasises the need for financially sound and sustainable policies that do not pass the burden on to future generations. In doing so, it has opted for a balance between reducing the national debt and making the investments needed to achieve a strong economy. The target is to achieve a structural budget surplus of at least 1% of GDP by 2011, to enable the national debt to be reduced from around 50% of GDP now to 40% by 2011.

RIS Commitment 4: Adjustment of social protection systems in response to demographic changes and their social and economic consequences

a) How has your country adapted social protection systems to societal and demographic changes?

By means of the new Social Support Act (WMO), the Work and Social Assistance Act (WWB), the Healthcare Insurance Act (ZVW) and modernisation of the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ).

See commitment 3 a).

b) What steps has your country taken to achieve a sufficient income for all older persons?

Besides measures taken to expand labour market participation, designed among other things to tackle the problem of poverty, the Netherlands has a solid, high-quality, widely

accessible pension system that many other European countries regard as exemplary. The Dutch pension system consists of three pillars:

1. the basic state old age pension under a statutory insurance scheme (1st pillar)
2. occupational pension entitlements accrued as fringe benefits of employment (2nd pillar)
3. supplementary individual retirement provisions, entirely separate from employment relationships, which anyone can take out on the insurance market (3rd pillar).

The basic old age pension (first pillar) provides an equal income for all residents at a level related to the net minimum wage.

With PAYG funding in the first pillar and capital funding in the second and third pillars, the Dutch pension system helps achieve a balanced distribution of the financial burden between people in work and pensioners.

c) What policies has it adopted to address on time the needs of older persons for a variety of social and health services, including sheltered housing and long-term care?

The government has presented to the House of Representatives a coherent vision of policy on the elderly in response to population ageing (April 2005).

d) How has your country promoted standards of living for persons with disability and for fragile older persons that allow them to maintain their independence and dignity?

By means of a statutory system of provisions under the Social Support Act, the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act, the Healthcare Insurance Act and the Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People Act.

What steps has your country taken to establish or further develop a regulatory framework for occupational and private pension provision?

The Dutch government is responsible for the state old age pension (first pillar) and for guaranteeing the pension arrangements agreed by the social partners. On 1 January 2007 a new Pensions Act replaced the Pension and Savings Funds Act 1952. The new legislation guarantees pension rights and entitlements, individual security – particularly equal treatment and the right to transfer accrued pension entitlements – and implementation, setting out regulations on participation, the provision of information and supervision. The government also has a role in making pension schemes mandatory and providing tax breaks for pensions savings.

e) Which changes have been implemented to the laws regulating mandatory retirement?

Mandatory participation in a sector pension fund imposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment on all employers and employees in the sector is a key instrument in reducing the number of employees without a supplementary pension. When central organisations of employers and employees jointly set up a sector pension fund, they may ask the government to impose an obligation on all employers and employees within the sector to participate in the industry-wide fund. In this way, agreements

between social partners are made binding for everyone in the sector. Mandatory sector pension funds in the Netherlands account for about 80% of all employees in the Netherlands who are in an occupational pension scheme.

On 1 January 2006 the Mandatory Participation in a Pension Scheme for Professional Groups Act was replaced by the Mandatory Pension Scheme for Professional Groups Act, with stricter requirements regarding solidarity and assessment on the basis of support among professionals in the branch. This is a fully-fledged piece of pension legislation covering mandatory pension schemes for professional groups and, as such, all the requirements of the Pension Act are applicable to these schemes. Under the new law the Dutch accrued entitlements transfer system is now also applicable to self-employed people, thus affording them better protection of their pension rights and facilitating mobility between employment and self-employment.

a) What policies has your country adopted to ensure the equal treatment of men and women in social protection systems?

No measures specifically designed to address the ageing issue have been taken under the state old age pension scheme since 2002. However, the fourth Balkenende government announced in its coalition agreement of 6 February 2007 that it intends to link pensions to wage levels. To this end, as many people as possible must continue working for as long as possible. With due respect for older people's freedom of choice, the government will ask older people with a higher income to pay towards the wage-linked state old age pension, either by continuing to work longer (up to the age of 65), or by paying extra contributions. From 2011 everyone born after 1945 will be asked to contribute according to their ability to guarantee that pensioners can benefit from the general growth in prosperity in the future. Anyone with an income above € 31,000 a year will receive an in-work bonus for every month they work after their 63rd birthday. The government will discuss how this scheme can best be implemented with the social partners.

Since 1 January 1998, same-sex couples have been able to officially register their partnership. This gives them the same rights and obligations in terms of the state old age pension and other social security schemes as married couples. The state old age pension applies in exactly the same way to married couples and couples in a registered partnership.

See commitment 8 d).

b) What policies has your country adopted to ensure that social protection systems support a better reconciliation of work and family responsibilities throughout the life cycle (e.g. through special leave arrangements for working parents and other caregivers, or supportive measures such as respite care services (professional care services provided on an ad-hoc basis to give the regular caregiver some time off)?

Working Time Accounts

Besides the developments concerning participation by older people, the Dutch labour market has also been affected over the past few decades by changes in the courses of people's lives. In early 2006 working time accounts were introduced to help people strike a balance between their various responsibilities, and between their phase of life, their time and their income. The scheme is for individual employees, and is designed to enable them to determine the amount of time they spend on work and other activities, according to their own needs and at different stages of their lives.

Working time accounts allow employees to save part of their gross salary each year in order to fund a period of unpaid leave in the future. The money saved can be used to care for a sick relative, to return to education or to take a sabbatical. It can also be used to retire earlier, in accordance with the demands of the social partners after tax breaks for early retirement schemes were abolished.

The new government's coalition agreement includes the further expansion and a reworking of the working time accounts scheme to support people who wish to remain in work. The new plans are currently being worked out in more detail. It has been acknowledged that the scheme is presently being used to facilitate early retirement. To encourage older people to stay in work longer, ways of gearing working time accounts towards partial retirement are now being studied.

The Work and Care Act 2001 combines a number of leave arrangements. The aim of the legislation is to make staying in work more attractive, thus dissuading workers from retiring. Another aim is to give employees time for matters other than work (care responsibilities). In 2005 the Act was extended to include long-term care leave. Employees have a right to long-term care leave to care for a spouse, registered partner, cohabitee, child with whom they share a family relationship, foster child or parent with a life-threatening illness. In principle, employees work part-time for a while, retaining part of their income, to give them more time to reconcile their work and care responsibilities. They work half their normal hours for a consecutive period of 12 weeks, and each employee may take up to six times their normal weekly working hours in leave (six weeks) per year. The leave may be divided differently, in consultation with the employer. Part-timers have a pro rata entitlement to care leave. Different arrangements may be agreed under a collective labour agreement or sectoral agreement.

The new government's coalition agreement includes several new policy initiatives: extending parental leave from 13 to 26 weeks and introducing pregnancy and maternity leave for the self-employed.

RIS Commitment 5: Enabling labour markets to respond to the economic and social consequences of population ageing

Has your country taken measures to promote access to employment opportunities and reduce unemployment rates especially for older persons, such as active labour market policies (job-search assistance, training, counselling, etc.), adaptation of curricula to labour market needs, measures to ease the transition between formal education and work, efforts to reduce non-wage labour costs

while protection workers' rights, easing of factors reducing demand for labour (e.g. too heavy administrative regulations, etc.)?

There are both general and specific measures designed to help older jobseekers. General reintegration policy is designed to ensure a more active and tailor-made approach to reintegration. Local authorities, benefits agencies and employers have a responsibility and the resources to provide the most effective possible support for jobseekers of all ages (mediation, internships, vocational training or job application training). Specific measures include exemption from the basic invalidity insurance contribution for employers who take on a new employee aged 50 or over or keep on an employee aged 55 or over, and the employed person's tax credit, which rises with age.

A specific target was recently set for the number of unemployed older people who are to be helped back into work. There will be close collaboration at national and regional/local level in support of the implementation of a plan of action over the next two years.

See also flexible and gradual retirement.

Has your country taken measures to improve the employability of older workers, e.g. through vocational guidance and training, promoting life-long learning (delivery of job-relevant training to enable workers to adjust to changing labour markets), improvement of working conditions?

It is primarily the responsibility of the social partners to improve employability. Employers and employees agree measures which are then laid down in collective labour agreements. Training and development funds have been established for almost all sectors to help pay for training requests from employers. The government does however play a role in facilitating and stimulating training for workers, particularly the poorly educated and older people who otherwise tend to be excluded from training opportunities.

Promoting lifelong learning for all workers is a high priority, with a particular focus on the poorly educated, who have after all received less training than the highly educated. The government contributes to the costs of on-the-job training by offering employers tax breaks. Alongside the existing facilities for training ex-unemployment benefit claimants for a basic qualification, and for people on working and learning programmes at regional training centres, on 1 January 2007 tax breaks were introduced for employers who institute an accreditation of prior learning (APL) process on behalf of their employees.

Since collaboration between all parties (employers, educational institutions, local authorities etc.) is so important in employee training, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) have launched a Learning and Working Project which is due to run until the end of 2007. The managers of the project facilitate the launching of specific combined courses and APL processes in collaboration with all parties. At the same time, steps are being taken to improve the quality and comparability of APL processes. The recently developed quality code for APL marks an important step in efforts to extend the use of this tool. The project

does not specifically focus on training older workers, though they can benefit from its activities, particularly the APL aspect. This is, after all, an ideal way of providing tailor-made training for older workers, who generally have a great deal of experience.

a) Has your country taken steps to raise participation rates in labour markets for all women and men, e.g. through removing barriers and disincentives to stay in employment?

A large number of policy measures are geared towards fostering labour market participation by both men and women. Roughly speaking, they involve 1) guiding benefit claimants back into paid work, 2) 'enticing' non-participants to participate and 3) keeping working people in work longer. General labour market policies naturally constitute an important framework for all these groups. Tax measures such as the working person's tax credit ensure that working is more attractive than not working. The tax credit has been raised gradually over the years. An additional tax credit is also available for people aged 57 and over, which rises with age, providing an even greater incentive for people in this age group to take a job or remain in work. Tax breaks are also available for training, including a scheme whereby employers pay less tax and social security contributions for employees who are in training ('WVA Onderwijs'). These schemes have been broadened over the past few years. The structural reforms of the social security system (unemployment benefit, invalidity benefit and social assistance) introduced in recent years are also designed to promote labour market participation. They include more opportunities for reintegration and a greater focus on customisation. Changes to the early retirement system have also been introduced to encourage people to remain in work for longer.

b) Has your country taken specific measures to increase the labour force participation of women, e.g. through suitable education and training, measures to broaden their job opportunities and avoid discriminatory situations with regards to pension benefits or personal income?

Several measures have been introduced to increase labour force participation among women. They include the supplementary combination tax credit for working parents, working time accounts and the new policy on childcare, whereby standards have been raised and more places created. Parents also receive more help with the costs of childcare. A statutory obligation for schools to provide pre- and after-school care was also recently introduced.

a) Has your country taken steps to offer incentives for the participation of older persons in the labour market (abolishment of incentives to take up early retirement, abolishment of disincentives to stay in the labour market)?

Encouraging older workers to continue working longer is emphatically the responsibility of the employers' organisations and trade unions, with the government playing a supporting role. Dutch policy is aimed at encouraging people to continue working longer by adjusting the favourable tax conditions applying to early retirement schemes and introducing working time accounts.

Changes to social security

- To reduce claims for incapacity benefit, since 1 October 2004 people under 50 who are incapacitated for work are being reassessed under the amended Incapacity Assessment Decree (Schattingsbesluit).
- It has been made more attractive for employers to employ and retain older workers. Employers do not pay basic contributions for disabled workers aged 55 and over already in their employ, and for employees aged 50 and over whom they take on.
- Employers who reinstate workers who are incapacitated for work receive up to one year's reduction in unemployment insurance contributions (WW) and invalidity insurance contributions (WIA). If an employer takes on a person who is incapacitated for work, the reduction applies for three years.
- Follow-up unemployment benefit has been abolished for those who entered the unemployment scheme after 10 August 2003. Older workers were previously entitled to follow-up benefit for three-and-a-half years.
- On 1 January 2004 the obligation to apply for work was reintroduced for unemployment benefit recipients aged 57.5 and over with a realistic chance of finding work. Certain older unemployed people who do voluntary work and/or care work may be exempted.
- Everyone receiving social assistance must try to find work as soon as possible and is obliged to apply for jobs. Local authorities have been given more freedom and responsibility for the administration of and local budget for social assistance, and have a greater role in effectively integrating benefit recipients into the labour market.
- The Work and Income (Capacity for Work) Act (WIA) was introduced on 1 January 2006 to reduce the number of people claiming incapacity benefit in the Netherlands. At the core of the new legislation lie financial incentives for employers and employees to reintegrate people who are partially incapacitated for work as far as possible.
- Although there are no legal restrictions regarding working beyond the age of 65, the question of what adjustments are desirable and necessary to remove disincentives to stay in the labour market beyond the age of 65 is currently being investigated.

Fiscal measures

- If an employee changes to a part-time job or a lower-skilled job with lower pay than their current job in the last ten years before they reach pensionable age, the salary they forgo as a consequence of accepting a part-time or lower-level job is still included in the accrual of pension rights, so that their pension is based on their old (higher) salary.
- Since 2002 it has been more attractive for older people to continue working, with the introduction of the increase in the employed person's tax credit for older people. The higher the age, the higher the tax credit.

b) What mechanisms has your country adopted to promote a smooth and gradual retirement?

Part-time pensions

Part-time pensions are provided for in Dutch legislation. The employer's organisations and the trade unions determine the scope of supplementary pension schemes and therefore also whether they include the possibility of a part-time pension. A person who retires part-time can receive pension payments while remaining partially in work, and continue to accrue pension for the hours still worked.

RIS Commitment 6: Promotion of life-long learning and adaptation of the educational system in order to meet the changing economic, social and demographic conditions

a) What steps have been taken to adjust education institutions to the needs of persons in retirement?

Central government has not been involved in introducing education for retired people. However, initiatives have been undertaken to provide higher education for older people, at 'Universities of the Third Age'. The 15 such institutions that exist in the Netherlands generally form part of a higher education institution or a legal entity affiliated to it.

No structural government funding is available for education for retired people. However, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and to some extent also the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport have in the past provided funding on an ad hoc basis for conferences, the development of a website and a study. Such ad hoc funding for education for older people will probably remain available in the future.

b) What initiatives has your country undertaken with respect to pre-retirement programmes?

Incentive schemes for employers and sector organisations to promote the development and dissemination of age-aware policies.

Experiments with sectoral and intersectoral employee mobility, to identify potential obstacles.

The Learning and Work Project (running from March 2005 to December 2007) was established to encourage learning among both workers and jobseekers throughout the working population of the Netherlands. The project does not specifically focus on older people, though they do fall within its target group. Temporary incentive schemes have been set up to generate the organisational capacity needed to bring together and motivate the various parties involved to ensure targeted training activities take place. The project includes promoting the use of APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) by improving the quality and comparability of results. APL can be used to formally acknowledge past experience, provide customised training and credit experience and non-formal learning.

The European EQUAL programme. APL programmes have been developed for older people: training older people to act as coaches for young people.

c) What learning methods have been developed to teach older persons the use of new information technologies?

In the 1990s the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport funded a programme that developed SeniorWeb, a website specially for older people. One of the main objectives was to encourage older people to learn about and use ICT. The programme funding was used to run ICT courses for older people. Though the funding has now ceased, the activities it was used to launch continue.

At present, various ICT training projects for older people are being run at local level in response to local demand (from local authorities and organisations for the elderly) under the Social Support Act (which has replaced the Social Welfare Act).

d) Has your country adapted educational curricula to prepare people to lives of continuous change and equip them with the necessary skills and attitude favouring flexibility? The use of which new didactic methods has been promoted in these regards?

The centres of expertise on vocational and professional education and industry have radically revised the examination requirements for secondary vocational education. The first 140 qualification dossiers were presented to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality on 1 February 2007.

The dossiers describe the tasks involved in a job and the competences required in order to perform them. Specific tasks and work processes and the associated competences (plus a further specification) have been set out as a point of reference for assessing the performance of newly qualified skilled workers. The new qualifications derive their strength from the combination of specific tasks and professional and individual competences. All workers who have both the professional and individual competences required can be regarded as competent. There are differences in emphasis depending on the level and nature of the work, but newly qualified workers must have both types of competence, not just one or the other.

The advantage of the new qualifications lies not only in the focus on an individual's ability to do the job properly, but also in the standardisation of the structure and terminology of the qualification dossiers. This standardisation allows connections to be made between different jobs and qualifications to be compared. The Netherlands is the only country in the world to have this system. A website where the information in the dossiers can be accessed online will be launched in spring.

a) Has your country taken steps to establish closer links between educational institutions and employers and to encourage employers to provide on-the-job training for workers of different ages, including older workers?

As part of the Learning and Work Project (running from March 2005 to December 2007) the ministries involved (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Ministry of Economic Affairs) have boosted regional cooperation between parties with an interest in a well-trained working population. The

managers of the project are using temporary grant schemes and knowledge of the use of APL (at the Knowledge Centre for Accreditation of Prior Learning in the Netherlands, Kenniscentrum EVC) to identify and achieve specific objectives for APL and dual courses combining work and learning through projects and project plans set out by the parties involved.

Central government, in the form of the Learning and Work Project management, does not therefore concern itself with the content of training courses and so does not itself make specific funding available to encourage learning in the workplace (on-the-job training). However, it does encourage the dissemination of best practice and learning from each other. As part of the project, workplace learning has also been developed and deployed by the project partners, including companies and regional training centres (ROCs). Companies and other stakeholders throughout the country will be able to adopt this method.

b) What initiatives have been taken to increase school retention rates and limit dropouts?

c) Have any special programmes been developed and/or promoted to facilitate the reintegration into the labour market of those who left early the formal educational system?

d) Has your country taken steps to make formal schooling more gender-sensitive, e.g. through the introduction of gender-sensitive curricula, specific programmes for girls and women, and specific programmes for older women to help them re-enter the labour market?

The Science & Technology Platform (Platform Beta Techniek) is studying how more girls can be attracted to science subjects. The Platform is also keen to see this knowledge used more effectively. It works with hundreds of companies, 1300 primary schools (set to expand to 2500 in the future), 250 schools for senior secondary and pre-university education, 50 pre-vocational schools (to rise to 100-150), a growing number of regional training centres (12 now, growing to around 25) and all higher education institutions to make science and technology more attractive. Experiments have been launched under all the Platform's programmes, and participants' specific gender policies on science and technology are being monitored and audited.

As regards the reintegration of women (including older women), there are currently no special centrally-run training or other programmes. A Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment programme that ran from 2001 to 2005 was designed to draw attention to and enhance efforts at decentralised level on behalf of female returnees (non-benefit claimants), including older women, with the aim of helping them back into work. In terms of numbers the results were disappointing, but in terms of quality, and based on practical experience, the project highlighted the obstacles and incentives to return to work and the characteristics of successful female returnees. This knowledge has been broadly disseminated.

Under the Work and Social Assistance Act (WWB), responsibility for reintegrating women (including older women) who are not claiming benefits and wish to return to the labour market lies with local authorities. Since the introduction of this legislation in 2004 most local authorities have concentrated on helping benefit claimants back into work, though some have also helped female non-benefit claimants wishing to return to work. This opens up opportunities for adapting the supply of labour to local needs. The growing labour shortage means that this group is attracting more attention.

RIS Commitment 7: Striving to ensure quality of life at all ages and maintain independent living including health and well-being

What actions have been taken to integrate ageing issues into sectoral policies?

Sport, exercise and mobility

- The Over-55s Sport and Exercise Task Force (Taskforce 55-plus sport en bewegen) receives government support. This partnership of organisations involved with sport, the elderly, housing and local government draws frequent attention from the public and politicians.
- A national exercise campaign (2003-2006) focused partly on older people.
- The main purpose of two of the five ‘settings’ (‘the neighbourhood’ and ‘care’) in the current National Plan of Action for Sport and Exercise (Nationaal Actieplan Sport en Bewegen, running from 2006 to 2010), is to facilitate and foster exercise for older people, with a focus on the physically inactive – generally older people and people with a chronic condition.
- Further development of a method proven to be effective in encouraging people to take more exercise – the Groningen Active Life Model (Groninger Actief Leven Model) – to ensure it can be applied cost-effectively by small local authorities.
- Study of the influence of older people’s life situation on sport and exercise.
- Fall prevention study and campaign for older people.
- Dutch participation (via TNO Quality of Life) in EUNAAPA (European Network for Action on Ageing and Physical Activity).
- No mandatory insurance for electrically-driven bicycles, which are mainly used by older people.

a) What targeted measures have been taken to decrease inequalities in access to health and social services, including for people in rural and remote areas?

The care institutions sector organisation ActiZ has launched an interculturalisation project to improve care for older members of ethnic minorities. The project includes recruitment of ethnic minority staff, and three pilot projects at local and regional level to develop examples of best practice that can be emulated elsewhere.

b) What initiatives have been taken to improve long-term care services for older persons, in particular community-based services mostly demanded in order to overcome the mismatch between home services asked for as against residential care services supplied?

A national programme has been set up to improve the quality of care (for the elderly, the chronically ill and the disabled).

c) How has your country improved the coordination and integration of services provided to older persons (e.g. through case management systems)?

See commitment 2 c)

d) What efforts have been made to improve the training of care providers: professionals, volunteers and family members?

Support from specialist centres of expertise at national level, and the use of provincial support organisations, including provincial Social Support Centres (CMOs).

e) What efforts have been made to improve the skills of older persons with regard to self-care, health promotion, prevention of disease and disability?

National centres of expertise, activities by organisations for the elderly and numerous local activities and organisations set up by and for older people.

What has been done to ensure efficient, equitable and sustainable financing of health and social services for persons of all ages?

The new Healthcare Insurance Act (ZVW), introduced on 1 January 2006.

In addition, Member States pledged to enable people to make healthy choices.

What measures have been taken to facilitate the adoption of healthy life-styles (e.g. information campaigns)?

The government has submitted a policy letter on health promotion and disease prevention (*Beleidsbrief preventie 2007*) to the House of Representatives.

The Netherlands Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention makes specialist knowledge available to those working in the field.

A contribution has been made to the European collaborative project, and examples of best practice have been exchanged.

Study of the (cost-)effectiveness of clinics for the elderly.

RIS Commitment 8: Mainstreaming a gender approach in an ageing society to support families that provide care for older persons and promote intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity among their members

a) What measures have been taken to mainstream gender, to remove all obstacles to achieving gender equality, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, and to promote individual development of women throughout their entire life cycle?

In November 2006 an Act came into force that implements Directive 2002/73/EC amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions.

Under the Act, harassment and sexual harassment are recognised as a prohibited form of discrimination, thereby increasing statutory employee protection.

The legislation also prohibits unfair treatment of employees who have experienced any form of harassment.

The Act strengthens employees' legal status in the event of harassment by:

- introducing a general shift in the burden of proof in harassment cases;
- introducing the option of bringing a case before the Equal Treatment Commission;
- expanding the protection against prejudicial treatment for persons who lodge harassment complaints.

b) What has been done to give particular attention to collection and analysis of gender- and age-disintegrated data?

Monitoring is carried out in several ways, including: research (the Equal Opportunities Monitor) into the position of employees on the labour market, which includes a study of pay disparity between men and women. The data are gender- and age-disintegrated. The results are published and presented to parliament every two years.

c) What measures have been taken to promote the economic rights of women (such as legislation to ensure equal pay for equal work, to protect other women rights at work place, and to reconcile family life with work life, etc.)?

An equal pay working group ('Gelijke beloning, dat werkt!') was set up in December 2005. The group brings together all the organisations that have a connection with the equal pay issue, including trade unions and employers' organisations, the Equal Treatment Commission, the Dutch Human Resources Policy Association (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Personeelsbeleid) and the Dutch Association for Employee Participation (Nederlandse vereniging voor medezeggenschap). In 2006 the working group delved into the topic of equal pay and generated several activities that are in keeping with Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment policy.

The working group's tasks can be summarised as follows:

- to increase familiarity with the statutory regulations on equal pay among employers' organisations and trade unions, individual employers and employees, human resources staff, works councils and collective labour agreement (CAO) negotiators;
- to increase compliance with the statutory regulations on equal pay among the aforementioned groups;
- to publicise and provide information about the equal pay instruments that have been developed, i.e. the management tool, the checklist, the gender-neutral job valuation manual and the step-by-step plan for works councils;

- to encourage training of employers, employees, CAO negotiators, works councils and human resources staff;
- to foster expertise and implementation within the organisations that the working group members represent;
- to conduct further research into areas the members of the working group wish to explore.

The working group further specifies and substantiates its tasks as necessary. The group completed its term in January 2007 with a final conference at which recommendations were presented. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment will consider these recommendations when devising its new policy.

d) Have social protection policies been reviewed to ensure full and equal participation of men and women in social protection systems?

The social security system (income, care, housing) draws no distinction by gender or breadwinner status. No further legislative processes or policy reviews designed to eradicate unequal treatment are currently under way.

e) What measures have been taken to encourage and facilitate equal sharing of family and care responsibilities between women and men?

From 2002 to 2004 the government ran an education campaign to foster more balanced sharing of domestic tasks by men and women. Though the campaign attracted a great deal of publicity, it was less successful in bringing about the desired change in behaviour. The coalition agreement signed by the fourth Balkenende government includes a commitment to extend parental leave from 13 to 26 weeks. This right will no longer be transferable. And parents will have the option of funding their parental leave from their working time account.

RIS Commitment 9: Support for families that provide care for older persons and promote intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity among their members

The RIS describes the family as the basic unit of society. Member States committed to provide support to families that provide care for older persons and to promote solidarity among its members, to respond to the needs and changing roles of individual **family** members and strengthen **intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity**.

a) How has your country adjusted its family policies to changing demographic circumstances?

b) What policies and programmes has your country adopted to respond to the needs of family members of different ages?

c) What are specific elements of these policies and programmes to promote equality between men and women?

d) Have you taken any awareness-raising measures concerning the contribution of older persons to family, community and society at large?

e) Have you adopted measures to help families deal with the growing responsibilities of care for their older members?

f) What mechanisms are in place to strengthen the role of communities, organisations and associations in providing support and care to older persons?

a to f

The government has appointed a Minister for Youth and Families.

The government submitted a Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport policy letter on family policy to the House of Representatives in 2006.

The working time account scheme allows workers to save leave to use for care of relatives.

More money has been made available for informal carers.

A facility for respite care, which relieves informal carers of their care responsibilities for a while to allow them to rest and recuperate, has been included in the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act.

What measures has your country adopted to support families in coping with social and economic consequences of demographic change (e.g. support to care-giving families, family friendly policies and services; adaptation of the infrastructure of towns to the needs of families, and in particular the young and older persons, and to ensure that generations can live together; improvements in planning of services)?

RIS Commitment 10: Promotion of the implementation and the follow-up of the Regional Implementation Strategy through regional cooperation

a) What activities have you undertaken to strengthen cooperation among UNECE Member States in the field of ageing (e.g. participation in meetings of the UNECE and the European Centre Vienna, exchange of information with Member States and the UNECE secretariat)?

Support for projects geared to European collaboration between researchers, centres of expertise and NGOs. The Verweij Jonker Institute for research into social issues is running a Healthy Ageing project. The English translation of the government letter on ageing policy has been distributed among the national focal points of EU member states (or ECE member states?).

b) How have you provided opportunities for civil society to cooperate in this process?

Extensive consultations were held with civil society organisations and experts from various disciplines and in various fields during the drafting of the government letter on ageing policy.

c) Have you requested the assistance of the UNECE secretariat and/or other entities of the United Nations system in the implementation of RIS? If so, what is your evaluation and how would you describe further needs for assistance?

No.

5. Conclusions and Outlook for the Future

This chapter is expected to

a) briefly summarize to what extent your country has addressed the challenges and opportunities of ageing since the adoption of the MIPAA/RIS in 2002;

See the summary at the beginning of the report.

b) indicate, based on the assessment provided and in view of future demographic developments, future policy challenges and perspectives related to ageing;

A new government was being formed as this report was being prepared. At the time of writing, it was not known what implications the coalition agreement would have for this field during the new government's period in office.

c) indicate major strengths and weaknesses of your country in the field of ageing;

A new government was being formed as this report was being prepared. It was not clear at the time of writing what changes in emphasis or new focuses would be introduced to the Netherlands' policy on the elderly in response to population ageing.

d) outline future activities in the areas of population and individual ageing and other related areas;

See above.

e) propose adjustments to existing policies;

See above

f) identify priorities for further policy research;

See above.

g) indicate capacity-development needs;

See above.

h) describe the need and/or request for exchanges of experiences across countries;

See above.

i) indicate your requests/needs/wishes with regards to the work of international organizations in the field of ageing.

See above.

Annex

1. List and contact details of organisations in your country directly involved in preparing this report.

A new government was being formed as this report was being prepared. At the time of writing the details of future policy on the elderly were therefore unknown. No NGOs were therefore consulted.

2. List and contact details of organisations in your country involved in the follow-up to MIPAA/RIS, by sector (government institutions, NGOs, academia, private sector).

Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of the Interior.

3. Attach, if applicable, the national action plan on ageing and the relevant laws on ageing.

The government letter on policy on the elderly in response to population ageing is enclosed.